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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0855
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1218
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 001157

SIPDIS

STATE FOR DAS MATTHEW BRYZA, EUR/CARC
DEFENSE FOR OUSDP DANIEL MELLEBY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL AJ

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR GUARDEDLY
OPTIMISTIC ON KEEPING FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Ambassador Derse, accompanied by EUR/CARC Office Director Baxter Hunt, met Novruz Mammadov, chief foreign policy advisor at the Presidential Apparat, on December 3. Ambassador unequivocally warned Mammadov that closure of United States-sponsored broadcasting in Azerbaijan would cause a serious rupture in relations, but expressed confidence that negotiations begun this week with BBG will lead to a satisfactory outcome (septels). Mammadov pressed for action in Washington on Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act and the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. He expected few concrete results from recent Russian and Turkish attempts to influence the N-K negotiations, but also called for heightened U.S. diplomatic activity to offset Moscow's assertiveness. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador also briefed Mammadov on preparations of documents for the Exercise Support Agreement (ESA) for REGIONAL RESPONSE 2009 and presented the USG draft of the Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection (CEIP) MOU, as well as DRL A/S Kramer's letter to President Aliyev.

Voice of America/Radio Liberty

¶3. (C) Referring to the state of affairs after meetings for a visiting BBG delegation earlier in the day with Mammadov himself, the head of the Presidential Apparat Ramiz Mehtiyev and the head of the National Television and Radio Council Nurshivan Marrahamli, Ambassador told Mammadov that the United States looks forward to a decision to extend the licenses of VOA and RL for a year in their current form (i.e., broadcasting on FM), during which time the United States would work with the GOAJ to assure their permanent presence in accordance with Azerbaijani law. (Note: Such an assurance will likely require an intergovernmental agreement, which, according to media lawyers consulted by the Embassy, is the main method under the law that a foreign broadcaster can operate on the national FM spectrum. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Ambassador was pleased that the GOAJ had treated the issue in talks with the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) as a technical and legal one, and said that the United States does not want to politicize the issue. However, she unequivocally told Mammadov that the issue is inherently political and closing down the broadcasts would have immediate serious consequences for Azerbaijan both in the

Executive Branch and Congress, which funds the broadcasts. Director Hunt added that Deputy Secretary Negroponte had told Azerbaijani Ambassador Aliyev the same thing.

¶15. (C) Mammadov indicated that he understood the stakes, but said that the U.S. position was difficult to explain inside the GOAJ. Many in Baku have difficulty believing that action on the broadcasting front could really affect issues like energy cooperation. Also, the GOAJ's earlier decisions to expel Russian, Turkish and Iranian broadcasters put it in a difficult position now, especially as strong constituencies in the GOAJ are sympathetic to Russian and Iranian interests. Nonetheless, Mammadov said, he is "sincere" and will work collaboratively to resolve this, emphasizing that the GOAJ's long-term policy of orientation westward is irreversible.

907 / Jackson-Vanik / Armenia

¶16. (C) Mammadov told Ambassador and Director Hunt that the bilateral relationship is also held back by several issues that Azerbaijanis find impossible to understand, including our "unjust and indecisive" position on Nagorno-Karabakh; Section 907, Jackson-Vanik; and generous U.S. aid to Armenia (a Russian ally - which he estimated at USD 1.7 billion, including MCC funds. The United States, he said, should pursue its aims in Azerbaijan with a "more sensitive approach," adding that this is what works with Eastern, Muslim societies like Azerbaijan.

¶17. (C) Hunt replied that while the Executive Branch generally

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regards 907 and Jackson-Vanik in particular as obsolete, they are political realities. Azerbaijan could spur their repeal with progress on N-K, he said, and also flatly denied Mammadov's belief that the U.S. had offered USD 600 million to Armenia to offset its economic losses from the August war.

Mammadov replied that it was widely believed in Azerbaijan that the Vice-President promised this aid to the Armenian PM during the latter's visit to Washington. "You can see where the negative attitude comes from," he added.

Nagorno-Karabakh / Russia / Turkey

¶18. (C) Mammadov argued that high-profile Russian diplomatic activity has significantly strengthened its position as a mediator in the N-K conflict, and he urged greater U.S. involvement. However, when asked if Russia's and Turkey's recent initiatives will produce anything concrete, Mammadov was pessimistic. "The (Moscow) Declaration doesn't solve the problem," he said, and separately characterized the recent round of high-level visits as "diplomatic tourism."

Approaches to the New Administration

¶19. (C) At several points in the meeting, Mammadov made reference to the incoming Administration, and noted the GOAJ's interest in having a senior delegation travel to Washington soon after the inauguration to meet new Administration officials. He positively rated President-elect Obama's defense and foreign policy nominations and expressed the view that the United States' strategic outlook as far as Azerbaijan is concerned is unlikely to change. Interestingly, while discussing the new Administration, Mammadov mused that if the issues of the three imprisoned journalists and the VOA/RL controversy "were not on the table, so much more could be done."

Comment

¶10. (C) Mammadov is one of the most reliable interlocutors

we have within the GOAJ, and his views merit particular consideration. It seems probable from the outcome of BBG's meetings here (septels) that the message has gotten through on the seriousness of the broadcasting issue. As long as the lid can be kept on the politics of the situation, the current approach seems to have reasonable prospects of success. On N-K, it is superficially inconsistent for the GOAJ to on the one hand warn the USG about Russia's strengthened position in the talks, and on the other dismiss the chances that Moscow's diplomacy will lead anywhere. However, this should be seen as an expression of Azerbaijan's need for "balance" in its foreign policy, i.e., the GOAJ derives its ability to pursue its interests independently of Moscow from the existence of an alternative supported by another first-tier power.

¶11. (C) Mammadov's litany of negatives about U.S. policy on N-K, 907 and Jackson-Vanik are recurring themes we hear with increasing intensity from all of our GOAJ interlocutors recently. Mammedov also referred several times to the growing difficulty he faces, as the President's international relations advisor, explaining USG positions in internal GOAJ councils and defending positions supportive of US interests. These comments are particularly telling coming from a reliably pro-U.S. figure, and suggest that the ongoing debate in the government about the appropriate degree of foreign policy "balance" continues to sharpen. These issues will certainly carry themselves forward into relations with the Obama Administration.

¶12. (C) Comment continued: Mammadov seemed highly focused on the next Administration, and in this sense reflected the attitude we observed recently from the Foreign Minister (septel). Strong, consistent efforts will be needed to keep the GOAJ focused on continuing issues in the remaining weeks of this Administration, especially as the GOAJ appears to have an unrealistic idea of how quickly a new Administration

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will be inclined to take up their concerns. This focus, however, also probably means that they will wait to feel out the new White House before making any commitments on N-K. Mammadov's comments suggest that there may also provide an opening for positive action on the journalists and broadcasters, if the GOAJ sees that efforts to make an early positive impression will bring results; although in the alternative his comments could be taken to mean simply that he hopes the new Administration will let those issues recede from view.

DERSE